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THE LEGISLATIVE EDITION

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**F**rom a young age, Jim Folsom, Jr. understood the power of voting and how the political process works. The oldest son of Governor James “Big Jim” Folsom, Sr. and his wife Jamelle, he was reared for a life in politics.

“I remember my father’s early campaigns, my father being Governor, political discussions, and being a Page in the Legislature when I was eight years old,” says Lieutenant Governor Jim Folsom, Jr.

It was a natural progression for Folsom to enter politics and he looked to his father for advice and tips on how to handle politics.

“We talked about basic political philosophy, trying to help those less fortunate,” says Folsom. “He believed the average Alabamian should participate in the election process, he eliminated the poll tax, and believed all should participate in government. He believed, as do I believe, those same values and philosophies. He also taught me all about campaigning.”

“He had a theory that I believe is true today,” continues Folsom. “In his political campaigns he would start in the fringe areas of the state, rural areas, where in those days they had never seen politicians. He would campaign very hard in those areas which are some places where modern campaigns do not send candidates.”

As much as he looked to his father for wisdom he did not try to emulate him.

“My father was too unique, a colorful political figure that was big in stature, big in heart, a great politician and a great statesman,” says Folsom.

Politics have changed since Folsom first entered the political scene. He was first elected to the Public Service Commission in 1978 and served two terms. In 1986 he ran for Lieutenant Governor and won and was reelected in 1990. In 1993 after Guy Hunt was removed office, Folsom was sworn in as Governor where he served until 1994.

“Back in 1978 when I ran my first campaign, politics had not had the transformation to what it is today,” says Folsom. “It

was still old fashion campaigning. It required a lot of healthy finances but not what it is today. Now you spend a great deal of time raising money.”

What has also changed is the nature of the Lieutenant Governor’s office. During Folsom’s earlier reigns as Lieutenant Governor, one of his roles was to organize the Senate. Today, the President Pro Tempore organizes the Senate and that is where much of the Lieutenant Governor’s previous power has shifted.

“The Senate is more contiguous than it use to be,” says Folsom. “The new structure is that one group wins, one group loses. So because of that it is more partisan, divided along party lines. The atmosphere of the body has also changed and because of that I think it has hurt the working relationship between some senators. I have always been an optimist and the only attitude you can take is that we will rise above this and work together. Hopefully we will take some of the partisan bickering out and let the senators focus on real legislation.”

“I try to act in the capacity of mediator,” continues Folsom. “I have worked with a lot of these senators before so there are relationships there that I have had for awhile.”

Looking forward, Folsom and the President Pro Tempore Senator Hinton Mitchem are “committed to reaching out and communicating with those senators who might feel left out. We are going to do so because it is the right thing to do.”

Folsom has always been a friend of state employees and while serving as Governor in 1994, passed an 8% COLA for state employees.

“State employees are very important,” says Folsom. “My office is run by state employees and I have an appreciation for them. Sometimes they might get a bad rap



when they shouldn’t. A great, vast majority are dedicated, hard working, professional people. They are good folks.”

He has also been a long-time supporter of ASEA and admires the association’s commitment to bettering the lives of state employees.

“I have had a close relationship with ASEA for many years,” says Folsom. “I deeply appreciate the support of ASEA and SEA-PAC during my campaigns and attribute a lot of my win to their support. I have friends in the organization and have developed relationships with many members and leaders within the organization. I respect what they do and what they have done for me.”

Like in 1994, Folsom would again support ASEA in seeking to obtain a COLA for state employees this year.

“If anything we, as lawmakers, should try and be supportive of the organization because fortunately the General Fund is probably in the best shape it has been in all of my years in government,” says Folsom. “Hopefully we can do the same things that we are both interested in.”

He believes that state employees should not feel like second-class citizens and wants to make sure they are treated fairly and compensated accordingly.

“They deserve COLAs and benefits just like private sector workers, just like anyone else,” continues Folsom. “I see it as part of my role as Lieutenant Governor to make sure state employees are treated fairly.”

After a life like Folsom’s spent in politics, we believe that you will.